

Purpose and Need and Project Objectives

**State Highway 82 / Entrance to Aspen
Environmental Reevaluation**

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**Colorado Department of Transportation, Region 3
and
Federal Highway Administration, Colorado Division**

**Prepared by:
HDR Engineering, Inc.**

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1.0 Introduction

This technical report provides a reevaluation of the project purpose, need and objectives for the State Highway 82/Entrance to Aspen. It is based on the Preferred Alternative selected in the 1998 Record of Decision (ROD).

1.1 Methodology

The review of project purpose, need and objectives was done based on the results of the reevaluation technical reports for all resources, and discussions with representatives from the City of Aspen, Pitkin County, Roaring Fork Transportation Authority, Town of Snowmass Village, the Colorado Department of Transportation, and the Federal Highway Administration.

2.0 Project Purpose, Need and Objectives

The 1997 Final EIS (FEIS) for the State Highway 82/Entrance to Aspen states the project purpose as follows:

“The purpose of the Entrance to Aspen Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) process is to develop a transportation solution that addresses the transportation capacity inadequacies and safety problems of the study corridor while avoiding or minimizing adverse environmental impacts.

The capacity of State Highway 82 within the project corridor is limited by the existing substandard roadway which does not sufficiently accommodate the travel needs of the residents, employees and visitors to Aspen. Currently, during peak periods, State Highway 82 is extremely congested and operates at failing (stop and go) conditions. The safety of the highway in the analysis corridor is extremely poor when compared to similar Colorado highways. The accident rate on the S-curves is 386 percent of the state rural highway accident rate average and 149 percent of the state urban highway rate. Insufficient roadway features in the analysis corridor are evidenced by narrow lineage, narrow and non-existent shoulder width, over-capacity intersections, and sharp right-angle turns with high speed approaches. All of these items contribute to the lack of capacity and a poor safety record for the existing highway.

Transportation demand forecasts indicate that traffic demand will continue to rise and the system will be operating over the available capacity of the corridor for large portions of the day. The transportation problems associated with State Highway 82 have been recognized since the late 1960s. There is a strong understanding in the community that these serious and significant transportation problems need to be addressed and that these problems have become worse over the years. ...” (Page I-1, FEIS).

The project purpose and need for transportation improvements remain valid, as demonstrated by current traffic counts, congestion conditions, safety and emergency access conditions, and traffic demand forecasts.¹

Ten project objectives were developed early in the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process for the Entrance to Aspen project. The 1998 ROD states that, “CDOT and FHWA have chosen the Preferred Alternative because it best meets the local communities’ needs and desires, fulfills the project objectives, and provides flexibility in future design decisions.”

The Project Objectives are shown below in Table 2-1, along with the description of how the Preferred Alternative, selected in the ROD, originally met those objectives. The table also describes how the ROD information² has changed, where applicable, and whether those changes have altered the project decisions made for the Entrance to Aspen.

¹ Updated information on traffic and safety issues is presented in the State Highway 82/Entrance to Aspen Traffic Characteristics and Safety Technical Report, Environmental Reevaluation, February 2007.

² The Final EIS, published in 1997, outlined the same project Purpose and Need, and the same ten project objectives, as the ROD. However, a different alternative was selected in the ROD than that designated as Preferred in the Final EIS. Therefore, the ROD information is what is reevaluated, because this reevaluation addresses only the Preferred Alternative selected in the ROD.

**Table 2-1
Entrance to Aspen Project Objectives**

No.	Project Objective as Stated in the 1998 ROD	How Preferred Alternative Selected in the ROD Meets Project Objective (1998)	Reevaluation of Objective and Current Conditions (2006)
1	<p>Community Based Planning <i>Provide a process which is responsive to local community-based planning efforts, including the Aspen to Snowmass Transportation Project and the Aspen Area Community Plan, with special attention focused on limiting vehicle trips into Aspen to create a less congested downtown core.</i></p>	<p>The Preferred Alternative has been developed through an extensive and continuous public involvement process with both local citizens and elected officials. Adoption of the incremental TM program as an integrated part of the Preferred Alternative provides for the goal of limiting future vehicle trips to existing levels while providing flexibility in adoption of stronger incentives and disincentives.</p>	<p>Remains valid. The Preferred Alternative is compatible with all new and updated planning documents and initiatives (see <i>Social Environment and Community Character Technical Report</i>). The TM program has been implemented beginning in 1995, and has succeeded in limiting average annual traffic on State Highway 82 in the study area to 1993/1994¹ levels. Congestion in the downtown core will not be further reduced until transit elements of the Preferred Alternative are implemented; currently, parking fees and restrictions may add to downtown congestion as people search for parking. (See <i>System Management and Traffic Characteristics and Safety Technical Reports</i>).</p>
2	<p>Transportation Capacity <i>Provide needed transportation capacity for the forecasted person trips in the year 2015. In doing this, this project will identify a combination of travel modes, alignments and transportation management actions to seek to achieve the stated community goal of limiting the number of vehicles in the year 2015 to levels at or below those in [1993/1994].</i></p>	<p>With incorporation of incremental TM program, the Preferred Alternative will provide for future transportation capacity. Though the highway system will operate under congestion, this congestion is considered part of the disincentive for single occupancy vehicle (SOV) travel and will increase transit usage. This objective sets the goal of limiting year 2015 traffic volumes to levels at or below those in 1993/1994. (In ROD, traffic levels are referred to as 1993 because the traffic model for the EIS was based on 1993 volumes; difference between 1993 and 1994 is minimal.)</p>	<p>Remains valid. The TM program has succeeded in maintaining average annual traffic volumes to just below 1993/1994 levels. However, as predicted, congestion on State Highway 82 continues to increase (peak hour counts are higher, and higher counts occur more often than in 1993/1994), and will continue to increase until more person-trips are transferred to high-capacity transit vehicles (buses or LRT). (See <i>System Management and Traffic Characteristics and Safety Technical Reports</i>).</p>

¹ The stated community goal in the FEIS and ROD is to limit "...the number of vehicles in the year 2015 to levels at or below those in 1994." However, throughout the FEIS and ROD, traffic volumes are referred to as levels at or below those in 1993. Levels are set at 1993 because the traffic model used for the EIS was based on 1993 volumes. The difference between 1993 and 1994 traffic volumes is minimal (ROD, pages 8 and 9). Therefore, in this Reevaluation, traffic volumes for the base year are referred to as "1993/1994 traffic levels".

No.	Project Objective as Stated in the 1998 ROD	How Preferred Alternative Selected in the ROD Meets Project Objective (1998)	Reevaluation of Objective and Current Conditions (2006)
3	<p>Safety <i>Reduce the high accident rate on State Highway 82 and the existing S-curves at State Highway 82/7th Street/Main Street and provide safety improvements for bicyclists and pedestrians. Provide safe access at all intersections for all movements.</i></p>	<p>The removal of non-local traffic from the substandard S-curves and the addition of a landscaped median separating inbound and outbound traffic will reduce the high accident rate on State Highway 82.</p>	<p>Remains valid. The accident rate for the Entrance to Aspen stretch of State Highway 82 has increased since 1993/1994, partly due to the S-curves alignment, and partly due to congestion increases. (See <i>Traffic Characteristics and Safety Technical Report</i>).</p>
4	<p>Environmentally Sound Alternative <i>Develop an alternative which minimizes and mitigates adverse impacts. A process will be used which follows the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), the 1990 Clean Air Act Amendments (CAAA), the 1991 Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA), and all pertinent legislation.</i></p>	<p>The Preferred Alternative minimizes and mitigates adverse environmental impacts. The Preferred Alternative exceeds the requirements of the CAAA and is one of the least harmful alternatives evaluated in the EIS. The Preferred Alternative mitigates the Section 4(f) resources impacts with the cut and cover tunnel, relocates all trails that are impacted, avoids impacts to the Holden Smelting and Milling Complex (alignment shifted north to avoid property takes within the historic site boundary), and compensates for impacts by returning some existing highway right-of-way to the City of Aspen.</p>	<p>Based on current conditions, the Preferred Alternative minimizes and mitigates adverse impacts. Some components have been built, and all prescribed mitigation has been accomplished. The Preferred Alternative exceeds the requirements of the CAAA, and will operate below the new 2015 mobile-source portion of the PM₁₀ emissions budget as set forth in the 2015 SIP. The project complies with NEPA, CAAA, and the 2005 Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU) which supersedes ISTEA, and with all other changes in environmental laws and regulations. The Section 4(f) impacts have been and will be mitigated as described in the ROD. To date, CDOT has relocated/restored approximately 10,000 linear feet of trails, and has conveyed 31 acres of open space to the city and county.</p>

No.	Project Objective as Stated in the 1998 ROD	How Preferred Alternative Selected in the ROD Meets Project Objective (1998)	Reevaluation of Objective and Current Conditions (2006)
5	<p>Community Acceptability <i>Develop an alternative which fits the character of the community and is aesthetically acceptable to the public.</i></p>	<p>The Preferred Alternative reflects the agreements reached to date between the communities while accommodating future decisions based on local discussions and elections.</p>	<p>Remains valid. The Preferred Alternative continues to meet agreements and resolutions reached to date in and among the local jurisdictions. However, the community continues to express divided opinions on the solution to the State Highway 82 traffic problems. The City of Aspen is planning additional community input and involvement activities after the completion of this reevaluation, to gauge the current community attitudes toward transportation improvements. Results of future local elections will continue to determine whether the Preferred Alternative (or any other transportation solutions) can be implemented.</p>
6	<p>Financial Limitations <i>Develop an alternative that is financially realistic with respect to current and expected funding levels and programs, while being responsive to both the community's character and prudent expenditures of public funds.</i></p>	<p>The Preferred Alternative is financially realistic, sensible, and responsible to both the community's character and prudent expenditures of public funds.</p>	<p>Remains valid. Though all design, construction, operation, and maintenance costs have escalated substantially since the ROD, the Preferred Alternative remains financially reasonable in today's financial climate, because it provides for a phased approach to implementation of transit elements. Non-phased alternatives (i.e., alternatives that require highway improvements and LRT construction simultaneously) are less feasible due to the high costs of LRT coupled with the lack of federal funding sources. The allowance in the Preferred Alternative for exclusive bus lanes provides an interim transit element with a higher likelihood of funding in the short term.</p>

No.	Project Objective as Stated in the 1998 ROD	How Preferred Alternative Selected in the ROD Meets Project Objective (1998)	Reevaluation of Objective and Current Conditions (2006)
7	<p>Clean Air Act Requirements <i>Since the Aspen area is a PM₁₀ air quality non-attainment area, the Preferred Alternative must meet the requirements of the CAAA by demonstrating project conformity.</i></p>	<p>The Preferred Alternative exceeds the requirements of the CAAA.</p>	<p>Remains valid. The Aspen area has been re-designated as attainment/maintenance for PM₁₀ and a new emissions budget has been set in the 2015 SIP. The Preferred Alternative is in conformity with the 2015 SIP, and would result in PM₁₀ emissions lower than the mobile-source portion of the new emissions budget. (See <i>Air Quality Technical Report</i>.)</p>
8	<p>Emergency Access <i>Respond to the need for an alternate route for emergency response to incidents inside and outside of Aspen.</i></p>	<p>The Preferred Alternative improves emergency access by providing an additional bridge across Castle Creek. The existing State Highway 82 right-of-way could be used as an emergency access route to and from the existing bridge if the new bridge becomes inaccessible.</p>	<p>Remains valid. (See <i>Traffic Characteristics and Safety Technical Report</i>.)</p>
9	<p>Liveable Communities <i>Provide a system which reflects the small town character and scale of the Aspen community, and which enhances the quality of life for residents and visitors. The system shall provide more accessible transportation which increases the mobility of the community and therefore provides for a more liveable community.</i></p>	<p>The Preferred Alternative is consistent with the goals of maintaining a small town character and enhances the quality of life for the residents and visitors by limiting vehicle traffic to 1993/1994 levels. The provision of an improved, efficient LRT system further enhances the livability and mobility of the community.</p>	<p>Remains valid. The provision in the Preferred Alternative for interim exclusive bus lanes prior to implementation of LRT will allow a high-capacity transit element to be implemented until funding and approval of LRT is secured. Accommodating increased person-trips through high-capacity transit will help maintain the livability and mobility of the community and visitors.</p>
10	<p>Phasing <i>Provide an alternative which allows for future transit options and upgrades.</i></p>	<p>The Aspen community has long expressed a desire for the high quality transit system that is included in the Preferred Alternative. The ultimate goal of the Roaring Fork Valley is to develop a fixed guideway system that connects Glenwood Springs to Aspen. The Entrance to Aspen LRT system may be the first step towards a realization of this goal.</p>	<p>Remains valid. The Preferred Alternative provides the flexibility to implement an interim transit solution (exclusive bus lanes), while preserving the right-of-way for an ultimate LRT system. This flexibility is considered to be more important in today's financial climate, where state and federal funding is limited.</p>

In conclusion, the 2006 reevaluation of the proposed project, the existing environment, and the updates to potential impacts and mitigation measures validates the ten project objectives set forth in the FEIS and ROD for the Entrance to Aspen project. As stated in Table 2-1, public acceptability is not unanimous, and public discussions and ballot issues pertaining to transportation solutions will ultimately determine whether or not the Preferred Alternative selected in the 1998 ROD is fully implemented.

3.0 Agency Coordination

The objectives of the Entrance to Aspen project were reviewed and discussed with representatives of the City of Aspen, Pitkin County, Town of Snowmass Village, Roaring Fork Transportation Authority, the Colorado Department of Transportation, and the Federal Highway Administration.

4.0 List of Preparers

Lucy Bowen, Project Manager, HDR Engineering, Inc.